1994

Black History Month:

Vignettes reflect past

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14

*African-Americans (w)

By Liz R. Carver
Tribune-Star

"There was a time that people didn't ever want to be called black. They said you're supposed to be called American. We always liked to talk about being Americans."
— Geneiva Ross

Talk with any person of color over age 55 about their heritage, and you'll hear them use varying terms for their race. They have been called slaves, Negroes, colored and black, names they would not have chosen for themselves.

Through it all, African-Americans have endeavored to maintain their identity as descendants of Africa, at the same time, continually reconciling their identities to fit ever-changing roles as English-speaking people with adopted western customs and cherished African bonds.

As an African-American, Geneiva Ross believes that any study of blacks is inadequately named if it is labeled "Black History."

"This isn't really black history. This is Indiana and Vigo County history," Ross said.

Daisy Hood
Early leader

Ross, who lives in the house where she was born some 60 years ago on East Fort Harrison Road, is a fifth-generation descendant of the Lost Creek Community. It was settled in the 1800s by a group of black farming families from North Carolina.

"My mother's grandfathers were the early settlers, Dixon Stewart and Jeremiah Anderson," she said. Ross's father could also trace his roots back to the Stewarts.

"The people who came here [to settle in] Lost Creek came bearing papers that they were free, and that they were born free."

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In 1827, a group of free blacks in North Carolina sent a scout to the Midwest to seek a suitable place to settle. The scout returned with stories about "fat hogs . . . roaming the forests" of Vigo County, and the black families sold all their land and came here, leaving a difficult life behind.

"We have some of the abstracts that date back to land being bought as early as 1828," Ross said.

In 1840, the Lost Creek African Methodist Episcopal Church was built. Today, an historical marker claims it as the site of a stop on the Underground Railroad for southern slaves who fled to northern states and Canada. A second church, built ten years later, continues to serve members of the community today.

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"They had worked, saved their money and came here, and they lived very much like other persons," Ross said. "It was a much different life than the social studies books say."

The African-Americans were proud of their heritage, though much of it had already been integrated and even lost through interracial marriage and offspring.

"Some of them had whiter skin. There had been a lot of mixing of races, black, white, Indians, every race you can think of," Ross said.

Evidence of early race mixing — the woman's complexion — is shown in this "freedom paper:"

"I, John P. Crump, clerk of Dinwiddie County [Virginia] do hereby certify that Mary . . . aged about 31 years, about five feet three inches high, of a yellow complexion, a scar on her breast, recovered her freedom by a judgment of the superior court

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Photo courtesy of Special Collections, Vigo County Public Library

In the beginning: Proud children [top] celebrate the opening of Charles T. Hyte Community Center at Terre Haute, circa 1942. African-American pupils [above] are busy with lessons in this 1904 photo of the segregated 10th District School.

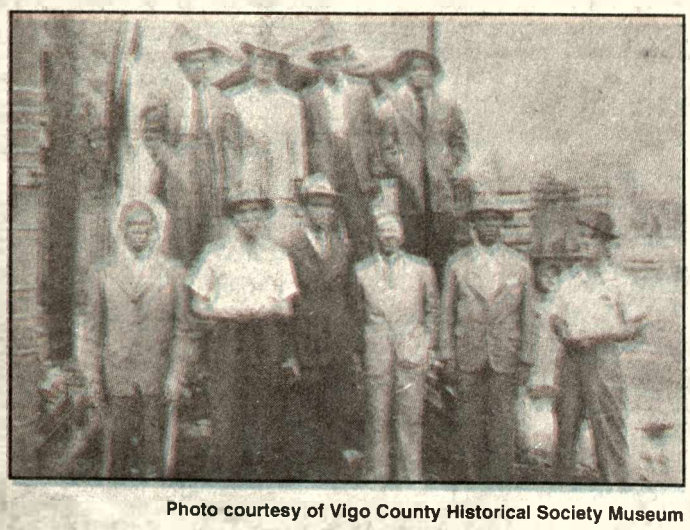

Photo courtesy of Vigo County Historical Society Museum

Zoot suiters: Men pose in their best suits in an unidentified Terre Haute industrial area, circa 1940.

Photo courtesy of Vigo County Historical Society Museum

Yesterday's children: Tots and teachers gather for a picture at a Terre Haute school, circa 1950.

Photo courtesy of Vigo County Historical Society Museum

Freedom: Lincoln School children ride a float in the Emancipation Day parade on Sept. 22, 1888.

Dorothy Jerse looks back every week at local history as reported in the Terre Haute Tribune and the Tribune-Star.

Ten years ago (1984)

● The Vigo County Schools Education Foundation Inc. was organized with a 15-member board. The idea for this new foundation had been developed under the leadership of Charlotte Caldwell with the help of Iverson Bell, both members of the Vigo County School Corp. board.

● Nearly 250 persons attended the "Roast John Scott Night" conducted by the committee to elect John Scott as Vigo County commissioner.

● Michele Ann Politz, Brian Bopp, Greg Walker, Carol Massey and Karen Miller were the winners of the American History essay contest sponsored by the Fort Harrison Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Dorothy J. Clark was the chapter regent.

● Glenn Andrew, basketball coach at North Central High School, achieved his 100th career victory when his Thunderbirds defeated the Hutsonville High School team, 76-74.

● Members of the Southwest Parke School board voted 3-1 to construct a new high school. It would replace the Rosedale and Montezuma high schools.

● Michael Williams and Laura Levy, students at Terre Haute South High School, won awards from the American Heart Association for their science projects.

Twenty-five years ago (1969)

● The Vigo plant of Charles Pfizer & Co. began producing a new detergent enzyme, trademarked Maxatase, for use in laundry products.

● Approval was granted for federally reimbursed pilot breakfast programs at Dresser School and at North School in West Terre Haute.

● Pam Piazza, Iverson Bell Jr. and Kathy LaVanne received Junior Achievement awards for leading their companies in sales.

● Housewives Effort for Local Progress celebrated its eighth anniversary at a luncheon at the Holiday Inn. Mrs. Alex Stern, Rollie Ewing, Warren Bowden and Mrs. Jack G. Weinbaum received awards for their contributions to the community. Dorothy Nichols Dobey, the mayor of Cincinnati, presented the program.

● Members of the Maple Avenue United Methodist Church held consecration ceremonies in their new sanctuary at 1203 Maple Ave. Shelton Hannig, general constructor, presented the key to the property to Byron Price, chairman of the board of trustees.

● Howard E. Wooden, Sheldon Swope Art Gallery director, presented the program "Pop, and Op Art — What is it? Who needs it?" to the Women's Division of the Gallery.

Fifty years ago (1944)

● An estimated 1,800 fans jammed the Hippodrome Theatre for the finales of the Tribune-Star Golden Gloves Tournament. The eight champions, who would represent Terre Haute at the Tournament of Champions in Chicago, were: Fred Shipley, Carl Brown, Johnny Mitchem, Jackie Spurr, Sgt. Louis Seprodi, John Olson, Al Derrickson and Knute Dobkins.

● Terre Haute firefighters and park workers completed a large ice-skating rink within the walls of Memorial Stadium. Music and bonfires were provided.

● Forrest Sherer, chairman of the tire panel of the Vigo County War Price and Rationing Board, termed the local tire situation as "critical." The board would no longer consider applications from individuals unless their work or business was vital to the national emergency.

● Clara Mason, Meis store employee, announced her candidacy for the nomination of state senator on the Republican ticket in the May primary. She had served in the Indiana House of Representatives in the 1927 and 1929 sessions.

● The Junior Human Society at McLean Junior High School met to hear a program, "Dogs in War," presented by Skipper Bedwell. Don Fasig was president of the group.

Barry ● Continued from Page B1

jokes flying about the beaver ambushing the truck in order to get at the tantalizing wood chips."

● The Associated Press reported on a lawsuit in Chippewa Falls, Wis., resulting from an incident wherein "a beaver chewed through a tree, causing it to fall on a fence, allowing Holstein heifers to escape from a pasture and wander onto some railroad tracks." Eight heifers were killed by a train.

● The Winnipeg (Canada) Free Press reported that a 71-year-old outdoorsman was sitting on the tailgate of his pickup truck when he felt a sharp pain. "He looked down," reported The Free Press, "and realized a large beaver had sunk its teeth into his left leg." Fortunately — and let this be a lesson to those who would limit the rights of citizens to keep and bear hockey sticks — the man had a hockey stick. "He beaned the beaver several times until it clamped on to his hockey stick with its teeth," stated The Free Press.

(We received one other extremely alarming beaver report in 1993, but we are too tasteful to mention it here, because it involved an incident on the Brule River in Wisconsin wherein a beaver gnawed through a tree in such a way that it landed in a fatal manner on a canoeist.)

So the pattern is clear: The beavers are striking back. Perhaps you are not concerned about this. Perhaps you live in an urban area, and think you're safe from attack. Perhaps you are a fool. Consider the following item from the Dec. 15, 1990, installment of the syndicated feature Ripley's Believe It Or Not:

"In the 1950s, beavers WERE DROPPED BY PARACHUTE IN CALIFORNIA to build dams in areas threatened by erosion!"

That's right: Beavers can be dropped from airplanes. They could land ANYWHERE. And please do not be so naive as to try to tell us that the government would not do such a thing. The government, and we say this as a loyal taxpaying citizen, is completely out of its mind. The government is perfectly capable of suddenly deciding to drop mass quantities of beavers on urban areas, especially if an economist suggests that this might create jobs.

So that is the situation. Nobody is safe. What can you do? You can be on constant alert. You can refuse to sleep and constantly dart your eyes around in a nervous manner. You can carry a hockey stick at all times, even to work. Perhaps your coworkers will laugh. Perhaps your boss will want to have a word with you.

Perhaps he will beg like a yellow dog for your help when he feels the Chomp of Doom on his ankle.

offers alternativ

Kids in Vigo County will be out of school Feb. 21, but they'll find plenty to do at the Terre Haute Family YMCA's Vacation Fun Day activity.

Vacation Fun Day is offered at the "Y" whenever Vigo County schools aren't in session during the academic year.

These Fun Days offer parents an alternative to leaving children home alone while they go to work, and at the same time give kids the chance to spend time in

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